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Secret Great Lakes study probed

Dingell, Stupak investigate possibility of White House role in withholding findings of health troubles in region.

Gordon Trowbridge / Detroit News Washington Bureau

Two Michigan lawmakers said Thursday they will investigate whether the Bush administration suppressed a scientific analysis suggesting that polluted sites in the Great Lakes region could be making residents sick.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, chairman of the Energy & Commerce Committee, and Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Menominee, informed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of their probe in a letter to the CDC's director, Julie Gerberding. Stupak chairs the committee's Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations.

At issue is a report completed in July by scientists at one of the CDC's agencies. The report examined records on polluted sites and on health problems in the Great Lakes region. While it was careful not to draw a direct cause-and-effect relationship, the report cited higher than normal levels of birth defects and cancer near many of the polluted sites, and recommended more study to learn whether the two were related.

Last month, the Center for Public Integrity reported that CDC officials had delayed release of the report, and that some scientists involved in reviewing it believed that the CDC researcher who wrote it had been demoted after he pushed for its release.

"If the conclusions of this study are accurate and correct, the health of millions of people in the Great Lakes region may be at risk," Dingell and Stupak write in their letter to the CDC. "Moreover apparent withholding of this report raises grave questions about the integrity of scientific research at" the agency, they write.

The letter asks the CDC to turn over any documents relating to the report or the decision not to publish it, as well as records on the demotion of Christopher DeRosa, the scientist who led the work on the report.

CDC officials did not immediately return a call requesting comment on Thursday, but when news of the study emerged, agency officials said it had been withheld because it was incomplete and required more review.

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